



## **News Release**

**For Immediate Release**

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### **Student Injuries Add Up in Utah Secondary Schools One-third of All Injuries are Sports-related**

(Salt Lake City, UT) – New Utah Department of Health (UDOH) data show that nearly 3,000 Utah secondary school students suffer a serious school-related injury every year. That means 15 students a day are receiving medical care or missing school due to a school injury. The department's research reveals that from 1997 – 2002, more than one-third (37%) of all secondary school injuries involved P.E., sports practice, or competition.

“It's clear sports injuries are a health concern that needs to be dealt with carefully,” said Utah Director of Risk Management Alan Edwards. “Our students are sustaining injuries that range from simple muscle strains to fractures, and even more severe injuries that can have long-term health effects.”

The UDOH School Injury Reporting (SIR) system data reveals that most secondary school injuries result from:

- Risk-taking behaviors among students
- Lack of proper conditioning
- Poor decision-making skills among students
- Inadequately maintained equipment
- Staff inadequately trained in injury prevention

As an example of poor decision-making, a catcher on a high school baseball team who forgot to put his mask back on after a play was struck in the face by a bat. He suffered a serious head injury and was temporarily blinded. In another case, a student was hospitalized with head injuries for 25 days after being struck in the head by a javelin.

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And a female student suffered frostbite after classmates packed eight gallons of ice cream around her as part of a fundraising challenge.

Provo High athletic trainer Donnie Bills is passionate about injury prevention. “My number one focus is getting our students to have a complete physical exam before they play sports,” said Bills. “Kids grow and change so fast in their teens that I insist every athlete undergo one every year,” said Bills. “Without it, I won’t let them compete.”

Those physicals have turned up potentially dangerous medical conditions, like asthma, heart murmurs and hernias, that could have been exacerbated by athletics.

The UDOH recommends school officials take the following steps to prevent secondary school injuries:

- Provide regular injury prevention training for staff.
- Establish an annual “injury prevention week” with safety fairs, parent workshops, and teacher refresher courses.
- Develop safety rules for gyms.
- Train students to use equipment properly.
- Ensure that sports programs include conditioning, personal protective gear, and adult supervision.
- Have a trainer, physician or EMT present at all competitions.

According to UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program Manager, Trisha Keller, “There’s no question following these steps will save schools, students and their families time and money, as well as the grief that results from preventable injuries.”

For more information on secondary school injuries, please call Cyndi Bemis, Violence and Injury Prevention Program, UDOH at 801-538-6348.

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*